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The Continuing Importance of Hunter-Gatherer Studies in Anthropology

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This new book is a critical contribution to the ongoing study of hunter-gatherer societies in anthropology, attempting to bridge sub-disciplinary boundaries in an integrated, interdisciplinary fashion. To this reviewer it appears more multi-disciplinary than truly interdisciplinary because of the rather diverse and little-integrated nature of most of the eleven chapters, a situation that is difficult to overcome in edited volumes like this one. The three editors certainly sketch some elements of the interdisciplinary approach in their introductory chapter and one can sense the potential for such symbiotic and synergistic research in other chapters as well. Regardless, it is an outstanding contribution to the broad field of hunter-gatherer studies in general and the editors are to be heartily congratulated for the fine rewards of their labor here. This book should remind us of the centrality of hunter-gatherer studies in anthropology, just as hunter-gatherers are arguably central to the experience of being human in the first place. It will be of interest to broad range of professional anthropologists and their students, including Africanists and others for whom hunter-gatherers are important.

This volume complements various other relatively recent publications on hunter-gatherers. These other works include important book-length publications, as emphasized here, by Robert L. Bettinger, Ernest S. Burch and Linda J. Ellana; Tim Ingold, et al.; Robert L. Kelly; Eleanor Leacock and Richard Lee; and Richard B. Lee and Irvén DeVore.[1] Other works include those by Richard B. Lee and Richard Daly; T. Douglas Price and James A. Brown; Carmel Schrire; and Nancy M. Williams and Eugene Hunn, among various others.[2] The present volume, like others, adequately demonstrates the continuing relevance of hunter-gatherer studies to the anthropological endeavor in other words. As explicitly (but briefly)

outlined in the introduction to this volume, contributions to hunter-gatherer studies have been diverse over the past thirty-four to thirty-five years—that is, since publication of the landmark volume *Man the Hunter*, based on a multi-disciplinary conference in the mid-1960s.[3] However, new contributions since the publication of *Man the Hunter* have typically emphasized one or another area of hunter-gatherer studies, whether archaeology, ethnography, biology, or some other aspect.

Cumulatively, these works continue to move hunter-gatherer studies generally forward, but it still remains to individual researchers to put the different pieces together and all too few of us have done so. Consequently, most hunter-gatherer research is incomplete and not integrated, no matter how large and significant the individual contributions may be. For example, we have splendid new diachronic data on archaeological sequences and other archaeological information for hunter-gatherers in Australia, South Africa and the Arctic of North America and Greenland.[4] These works often lack a truly biological scope, however.[5]

In addition, we have relatively new and wonderful ethnographic and ecological examples of data on hunter-gatherers in the few areas worldwide where hunter-gatherers have escaped complete encapsulation within market economies. Many examples might be cited, but only a few can be referenced here.[6] In this case, the perspective is typically synchronic, with little time depth and/or often little or no sense of the human biology involved, even in some cases where archaeologists are involved.[7] Other cases are strictly historical, with some useful time depth but again human biology is rarely mentioned, often by design.[8]

Rich and largely unprecedented biological and demographic data for contemporary hunter-gatherers have been presented elsewhere, but these too often lack time depth.[9] Thus, it is very difficult to determine whether

the available data are representative of past people in the same region. Linguistic data are even more rarely addressed for hunter-gatherers. Yet, hunter-gatherer languages are arguably even more endangered than the societies themselves, given the likelihood of language shift of such groups in favor of languages brought by intrusion of their neighbors and the dominant nation-states within which they are now situated.[10]

Much of this differential research focus is inevitable, given our individual and collective focus and capabilities. Nonetheless, the incomplete nature of any one study or research project shows us that we need to continue to develop new techniques and new critical perspectives in hunter-gatherer studies, combining anthropological elements from archaeology, biological anthropology, linguistics, and socio-cultural anthropology whenever and wherever possible. It is this dimension of collectivity that is perhaps the most important contribution of this book and where it begins to break new ground in various areas within the broad spectrum of hunter-gatherer studies, including aspects of human ecology, biology and society. Yet, there is still more to do in this regard and truly interdisciplinary research remains somewhat of an elusive goal, as we shall see in looking at the individual chapters in this recent volume.

To begin a chapter-by-chapter review of the present publication, Panter-Brick, Layton and Rowley-Conwy paint a broad but brief picture of hunter-gatherers and hunter-gatherer studies in their introductory chapter to the volume. They review trends in recent research and publication, documenting the distance that most studies have moved away from biological anthropology and human ecology, as represented by the recent volume by Lee and Daly (1999), for example. Consequently, the volume editors set an agenda that centers on three major questions: "Is 'hunter-gatherer' a meaningful category? How have hunter-gatherers been characterized by previous research? How do we approach hunter-gatherer variability?" (p. 2). As they tell us, they answer the first two questions themselves and then outline how the other ten chapters help address the question of variability.

To answer the first question, the editors provide their own definition of hunting and gathering as "subsistence activities entailing negligible control over the gene pool of food resources" (p. 3) and rightly conclude that this is still a meaningful and useful category in anthropology. However, following Lee and Daly and many others, they equate hunting and gathering with "foraging" so as not to privilege the hunting (or any other) part of the definition. As an aside and following the suggestion of Alice Kehoe,

this may well be an unfortunate, if entrenched, choice of terminology. This is because standard dictionary definitions of "forage" and "foraging" seem to suggest various things besides "the act of foraging," or the "search for provisions" such as "food for animals," "to strip of provisions," "spoil or plunder," "ravage," "raid," or "rummage." None of these alternative meanings, besides searching for provisions, seems to be the message we would choose to associate with hunter-gatherers and some greater degree of terminological precision may well be prudent in this case.

In examining the editors' second question about past characterizations of hunting and gathering, they readily admit that hunting and gathering goes beyond subsistence to include social organization and ideology/cosmology/world view. Given the diversity of hunter-gatherers and related details, the editors sensibly advocate a "fine-grained" assessment where possible of their relationship to natural environments and presumably social environments as well, although this is not made fully explicit here. In any case, they go on to point out that it is the variability in hunter-gatherer behavior and their flexibility that has become more characteristic of and more appropriate in contemporary hunter-gather studies, rather than the normative, reductionist approaches of the past. Sketching some of the dimensions of this variability is finally emphasized, where they highlight some of the key contributions of the other volume participants.

In chapter 2, Bruce Winterhalder outlines his "behavioral ecology" approach to hunter-gatherers and "optimal foraging models." Winterhalder reiterates the primacy of economy here as distinct from what he believes to be derivative features such as "band-level" socio-political organization and "egalitarian" status. In looking at variability, one might question the necessary correlation here in these features since we can cite examples of hunter-gatherers who presumably once demonstrated something other than band structures and that were certainly non-egalitarian. These cases were likely the exception, rather than the rule, however, at least in terms of egalitarian status and their occurrence can be correlated with unusually rich environments, as far as we can tell, as among the Calusa and Northwest Coast cultures in North America, for example. In any case, Winterhalder at least pays lip service to the recognition of hunter-gatherer variability, since he admits that "[t]hey vary along every imaginable dimension of socio-economic comparison" and then goes on to emphasize four generalizations. These include "apparent under-production, and a general lack of material accumulation;" "routine food sharing;"

“egalitarianism;” and “a routine division of labor between the...activities of males and females.”

This reviewer began to lose his grip on this chapter when Winterhalder edged his way into a standard behavioral ecology perspective, as seen before.[11] “Optimisation” is certainly a useful hypothetical construct and does a lot to help build models to account for human behavior, but it is only a model. As Winterhalder readily admits, he is “self-consciously reductionist” in his “resource selection” (or “diet choice”) model, using a micro-economic concept, “opportunity costs,” or the fact that pursuing one thing precludes pursuing another. Other micro-economic concepts in this work include “marginal analysis” and a series of related “production” and “distribution” theories derived from behavioral ecology. This chapter does a good job of outlining such approaches and Winterhalder is very honest about them, but his model is not completely convincing, nor does it provide a good case study where the concepts are thoroughly applied and tested, at least not here. One has the feeling that these theoretical contributions are more hypothetical than practical, although Winterhalder has done a good job of explaining them conceptually.

Chapter 3 by Peter Rowley-Conwy assesses an “icon” among hunter-gatherer studies over the past twenty to thirty years, the concept of the “Original Affluent Society,” as first proposed by Marshall Sahlins.[12] In reality, the “Original Affluent Society” stands in for hunter-gatherer societies in general, as described in the *Man the Hunter* volume, or so Sahlins apparently reasoned. As a corrective measure against past stereotypes, Sahlins proposed another, namely that hunter-gatherers were more “affluent” than traditionally recognized, using scant data derived from the San in southern Africa and Australian Aboriginals. With more precise data available today and further thinking on the matter, Rowley-Conwy addresses this question again and points out the demonstrable variability among ethnographic hunter-gatherer and the greater difficulties of assessing this for archaeological groups. Some groups have been more complex related to greater economic intensification for different reasons and thus, more “affluent,” and others have not been “affluent,” at least for reasons commonly understood. For Rowley-Conwy, local responses to environmental conditions and historical factors have been more influential in hunter-gatherer diversification than simply the passage of time—this is, in his words, an “adaptationist” view. This view counters past ideas about the necessary, inevitable and slow increase in complexity over time among hunter-gatherers, or what can be called the “progressivist” view. Thus, following the adaptationist

logic, one can also question the matter of “originality” in the “Original Affluent Society.”

Rowley-Conwy also proposes a four-fold typology of hunter-gatherers. Speaking broadly, these four types include groups that move few, if any, resources in “logistical” fashion and store few or no resources; those that move resources logistically, but do not defend their territories; logistical groups that defend their territories; and those that are sedentary, defend their territories, and store resources. Rowley-Conwy builds on past research here, but his exposition is clear and well presented. He goes on further to present a survey of archaeological examples of hunter-gatherers that enable him to debunk six rather standard assumptions about hunter-gatherers. These standard assumptions are that there has been a long-term trend from “simple” to more “complex” hunter-gatherer forms over time; early modern humans exhibited only “simple” hunter-gatherer forms; change toward complexity occurred slowly; change toward complexity was irreversible; change toward hunter-gatherer complexity was a step toward farming; and the most interesting hunter-gatherers are those who became farmers. Although this reviewer may be biased because of my background as an anthropological archaeologist, for my money this is a clever chapter and one of the best in the book, largely because it usefully challenges stereotypes about hunter-gatherers in broad contexts. Even though I am not ready to completely throw out the utility of past stereotypes in all cases, this is an important revisionist review and an important contribution.

In chapter 4, Robin Torrence addresses hunter-gatherer technology on multiple scales, both micro and macro in perspective, in some ways paralleling the scope and tenor of Rowley-Conwy’s chapter. Torrence begins by explaining that material culture and technology in general have been ignored in recent anthropological research because of the rejection of the inevitability of cultural evolution and the role of technology in such theories. This is almost a truism, but it is important to be cognizant of this fact when we wonder why we don’t know more about hunter-gatherer technologies archaeologically and ethnographically. We agree that ignoring material culture and technology is akin to throwing out the baby with the bath water. Variability in technology still remains an important part of hunter-gatherer research in general and various researchers have promulgated this view for some time.[13]

For Torrence, “technology” can be defined as a complex nexus of “physical actions,” “chosen materials,” and “desired outcomes,” as well as the tools and other forms

of material culture themselves and their applications. Moreover, technology exists within social, symbolic, and historical contexts and this too makes it a matter worthy of focused research. It should be studied both on the “macro,” broadly comparative level as well as on the “micro,” often more particular, level. We are further reminded: “Technology is devised to suit a task, but the exact details are culturally conditioned. Everyone [within a particular group] is unlikely to be aware of every option and once one has been chosen, it may condition and limit further options” (p. 87). This is a particularly important point when one chooses to work with material culture as a marker of social identity in archaeology and ethnography alike. It also obviously pertains in the study of hunter-gatherer gender, “ethnicity,” and symbolism, among other topics.[14]

Chapter 5 by Steven L. Kuhn and Mary C. Stiner address the antiquity of hunter-gatherer adaptations as manifested in the archaeological record, especially in reference to the common stereotype that they represent 99 percent of the evolutionary history of humans. They propose outlining the limits of modern, ethnographically known hunter-gatherers over about the past 150 years as a baseline for comparison with earlier archaeological evidence, with particular emphasis on subsistence and technology because of their ubiquity in the archaeological record. Like Rowley-Conwy and Torrence, Kuhn and Stiner usefully outline their general expectations about hunter-gatherers and then propose that the deviations from these expectations are of the greatest interest in hunter-gatherer research.

Kuhn and Stiner use their expectations to describe, compare and contrast the Middle Paleolithic period (a.k.a. “Mousterian” technology) (maximally ca. 250,000-30,000 years ago) with the Late Upper Paleolithic (ca. 20,000-10,000 years ago) in western Eurasia (but not in Africa for the Africanists reading this). This is a detailed comparative analysis and their characterizations seem sound at first to someone who doesn’t specialize in these periods and environmental settings. They conclude that Late Upper Paleolithic and more recent hunter-gatherers are distinguished from the Middle Paleolithic by “greater technological investment in response to seasonal or unpredictable food supplies” and a landscape more filled with people and the need “to manipulate social ties” to buffer resource risks (p. 128). However, it should be emphasized that Kuhn and Stiner’s agenda clearly seeks to differentiate Middle Paleolithic from Late Upper Paleolithic behavior and they take various measures up front to help their case. For example, they omit consideration of the Early Upper Paleolithic period (ca. 35,000-20,000 years

ago), which to some degree is difficult to deal with but may explain admitted continuities. Likewise, they omit review of the African continent over this entire span for the same reason, that is, they wish to minimize the clinal differences that apparently then characterized hunter-gatherers there.

Elsewhere, again, when the authors evaluate some of the relevant evidence for their review of changes in western Eurasia they tell us that Middle Paleolithic/Mousterian material culture lacks geographic trends within the study area. They go on to admit that Middle Paleolithic/Mousterian groups lived across diverse environments, had varied tools across geography, and at least some long-distance transport of lithic (stone) materials. Secondly, Middle Paleolithic/Mousterian groups focused on “high-ranked prey,” or prey that would produce significant food when successfully taken, but they did take some small prey and overall their resource mixtures varied with latitude, as for later groups. So, what do these differences mean vis-a-vis later Upper Paleolithic and modern hunter-gatherers, who have typically (but not uniformly) shown such geographic trends in their tools and a greater dependence on lesser-ranked game?

It is not possible to fully review any aspect of this intriguing chapter here, but various other data might have been incorporated into it, both from the same region and from others. Some of these data would help us demonstrate more long-term continuity than difference over the time span in question and between the study area and various other areas worldwide, perhaps leading to quite different conclusions. Alternatively, one might turn the question around and investigate the mechanisms inherent in behavior that account for so little diversity in tool forms within Middle Paleolithic/Mousterian assemblages—how was this relative uniformity developed and maintained over immense distances for such a long time? Were they so broadly generalized and/or adapted that there was little need for much variation? We might raise various other questions, but in the end there is no reason to mount such a critique here since the authors readily recognize continuity, as well as difference, over time among hunter-gatherers at some level. Kuhn and Stiner appropriately admit that “Many profound changes in hominid adaptations occurred prior to the Upper Paleolithic and some of these remain essential to what it is to be human” (p. 128).

In Chapter 6, Patrick McConvell addresses the issues of “language shift” and “language spread” for hunter-gatherers. “Language shift” is the abandonment of one

language for another without population replacement, while “language spread” is just what the name implies, the expansion of a language over time. Though it has become fashionable to downplay language shift in favor of long-term continuity among indigenous people worldwide, McConvell tells us that a more complex set of circumstances pertains in most, if not all, areas. Local changes in languages have been certainly exacerbated by colonial forces over the past 500 years or so, with major language shifts and spreads occurring among many hunter-gatherers and others. Distribution models of language patchiness, random expansions and contractions for hunter-gatherers (and their farming neighbors, among others) are not really appropriate, according to McConvell. He recognizes the importance of language contacts and convergence over divergences, and standard divergence and migration scenarios can be generally rejected. Language divergence does occur in some cases, but only in a “punctuated equilibrium” fashion, with periods of rapid change as occurred during colonial interchange. Migration of people is sometimes responsible for language spread, but language shift is also possible. In the end, McConvell give priority to neither migration nor language shift as the means of language spread historically—language spread occurs by either one or both mechanisms.

Renee Pennington reviews hunter-gatherer demography in chapter 7, with demography describing numerically how groups behave spatially, marry, reproduce and die. Birth and death rates are important in demographic approaches, but they do not constitute the whole of this research arena. Pennington points out that there are few such data available for hunter-gatherers and this hampers our understanding of some basic questions. Nonetheless, using the available data, we see that “hunter-gatherers” have a “total fertility rate” (expected number of births during a woman’s reproductive span) that ranges from 2.6 to 8. However, some of the groups included here (e.g., Cayapo, Cashinahua, and Xavante in South America) are not “true” hunters-gatherers, as I know from my own research in Amazonia, but their removal from the overall sample does not change the picture in any case.

Perhaps even more usefully Pennington addresses the commonly held assumption that sedentization causes an increase in the total fertility rate for a given group, including hunter-gatherers and others. Instead, the increase in total fertility may be more due to the introduction of antibiotics and other modern medicine since she finds ample evidence of infertility caused by infectious disease, specifically sexually transmitted diseases,

among sedentary and non-sedentary groups, as in Africa and the Pacific. She thoroughly reviews the case of the mobile versus sedentary !Kung in comparison with other hunter-gatherers for total fertility, birth intervals, and survival, and goes on to broader conclusions. Pennington concludes that the available hunter-gatherer data suggest that humans have more likely experienced both boom and bust over time, rather than slow, steady growth based on fertility rates and survival rates, again more akin to “punctuated equilibrium.”

In chapter 8, Mark R. Jenike presents an overview of “nutritional ecology,” focusing on subsistence ecology among hunter-gatherers. Human nutrition, diet, and food-getting behavior are primary areas of concern, along with energy “budgets,” pathogens and body growth. Of note, the quantitative research of Richard Lee and others among the !Kung inspired comparable nutritional research among various other hunter-gatherer groups. Jenike suggests up front that the nutritional ecology of modern hunter-gatherers is likely to be more marginal than many past groups, and so we must be cautious about overgeneralizing from the modern data, however suggestive and useful these data may be. Nonetheless, information on seasonal and within-group variability leads him to question normative models since these models probably mask actual variability in all cases. Further, Jenike suggests it was energy, rather than protein, that was the limiting factor among hunter-gatherers cross-culturally. Unfortunately, studies of energy expenditure, like energy in intake models, have been rare for hunter-gatherers and Jenike goes on to suggest a general model of how all such components should be integrated. The challenge in all such future studies is to fully integrate information from different aspects of nutritional ecology to address variability among hunter-gatherers.

Alain Froment reviews the ecological and genetic aspects of the evolution of modern hunter-gatherers. He quickly acknowledges that this has been a “way of life” defined culturally and not biologically, although some researchers have looked for “biological outcomes” shaped by their closeness to the environment, the small size and mobility of their groups, diet and work. Froment reviews questions about adaptation to ecological constraints such as climate and diet in hunter-gatherer biological evolution, including, among others, whether a small body size and other anatomical traits are related to hunting and gathering, whether these traits changed recently, whether their generalized “diet” is optimum in an evolutionary sense, whether things changed with the advent of farming, and what does their future hold? After

a detailed review, Froment concludes that the question of typical small body size for hunter-gatherers cannot be conclusively answered by any of the available hypotheses and he addresses many other general biological questions as related to ecological constraints. For example, he suggests with good reason that modern hunter-gatherer diets have become less varied than they were in the past due to recent transformations. In fact, many no longer depend on hunted and/or gathered food sources much, if at all—cultivated foods have become increasingly important, whether produced by them or external farmers.[15]

Moving on to genetic questions among hunter-gatherers, Froment addresses a range of issues ranging from the “gracilisation” and other forms of genetic plasticity to genetic differentiation across space and time, as well as health constraints, epidemiology, infectious disease, viruses and bacteria, parasites, and chronic diseases. The details scattered across the examples Froment reviews are fascinating, but it is difficult to draw many conclusions from these disparate data beyond the general observation that hunter-gatherers share many health problems with the rest of us, not living in a “Garden of Eden,” or any other “lost Paradise.” Froment briefly discusses how

“[f]or most indigenous minorities, the transition to modernisation is [a] synonym of impoverishment, racism, violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, suicide and social disintegration. In fact, the tendency to consume toxic substances can be symptomatic of an unconscious desire of self-destruction, and a mute protest against the collapse of the old values. For Pygmy, San, Negrito, Inuit and other economically marginal groups, ways of life have already changed or will soon do so, with modifications of the environment, such as game depletion and competition from other types of economies.” (pp. 258-259)

Finally, he concludes by saying, “In the end, the biological consequences of modernity for hunter-gatherer groups will be dictated by the evolution of social prejudice against them, their access to school, affluence and health facilities, the acknowledgement of traditional rights to land, as well as their own choices in the matter of development” (p. 260).

In chapter 10, Margaret W. Conkey provides an overview of “art” among hunter-gatherers, with emphasis given to those examples that survive in the archaeological record. Conkey identifies three aspects of most interest here: clarification of what “art” is, consideration of the range of “art” forms among hunter-gatherers,

and interpretation of “art” in these settings. To answer the first question, Conkey (and many other anthropologists) tell(s) us that “art” is inseparable from other aspects of hunter-gatherer “material culture” and even the immaterial in a rich, symbolic world bound up with social and cultural phenomena. She usefully goes on to portray how anthropologists have studied “art” in the past, including structuralist, psychological and ethnoaesthetic approaches, for example, but typically in a synchronic, static perspective rather than a diachronic, processual one. Obviously, we need to combine both perspectives and Conkey seeks to remedy this, at least in brief.

In terms of the forms of hunter-gatherer “art,” Conkey reminds us that archaeological examples are strongly conditioned by preservation conditions. Many, many examples have been undoubtedly lost over time archaeologically, with only some forms such as “rock art” (pictographs and petroglyphs) and carved sculpture surviving. The loss of most organic and “perishable” forms of material culture is nearly ubiquitous.[16] Using ethnographic and rare archaeological examples, however, we can begin to see the richness and breadth of what were once characteristic “art” forms among hunter-gatherers. The importance of their cultural contexts emerges in ethnographic examples, even though here too the record is incomplete due to losses brought by colonialism and culture contact.[17] Using fine-grained techniques we are also learning to more fully assess previously ignored archaeological specimens and these too demonstrate artistic richness, although it is never easy to reconstruct the precise contexts of past cultures.

How are we to interpret hunter-gatherer “art”? This topic transcends this tantalizing chapter by Conkey. Nonetheless, she suggests that “formal” and “technological” approaches and some “universalist premises” are all relevant. The first two of these areas would seem to be self-evident, but Conkey is correct in explicitly mentioning them since they have been too often ignored in contemporary anthropology as “trivial.” In the case of the “universalist premises,” however, these can be problematical and reductionist in cases where uniformly applied and/or assumed, rather than tested as hypotheses. She goes on to show some of the insights that can be gained through studying hunter-gatherer “art,” using rich ethnographic examples from the Northwest Coast of North America and Australia. In the end, this is a compelling chapter that one might wish to see expanded.

In chapter 11, Robert H. Layton takes a sober look at the veracity of modern groups as hunter-gatherers and the use of ethnographic data to reconstruct adapta-

tions in the past, what has been previously called “ethnographic analogy.” Moreover, this chapter reviews the nature of interactions between hunter-gatherers and non-hunter-gatherers and the effects of these interactions. Much of it is related to hunter-gatherers in a longitudinal perspective. One particular angle is whether they demonstrate a continuous history of hunting and gathering, and whether they determine the course of their own lives (“genuine” hunter-gatherers, as employed previously, but defined by Layton). Alternatively, they may be now marginalized dependents and/or they have been transformed to modern hunter-gatherers from some other economic pattern (“spurious” hunter-gatherers). This case is briefly reviewed in terms of information on the !Kung in the Kalahari Desert and allows Layton to raise a series of primary questions about how hunter-gatherers have responded and changed through contact with non-hunter-gatherers. As with several other chapter authors, Layton portrays the dangers in looking at hunter-gatherers in a static fashion. He goes on to emphasize the likelihood of hunter-gatherer change and adaptation over time, even where due to environmental conditions and/or internal creativity, rather than due to external pressures from farmers and others, including other hunter-gatherers, both before and during colonial times.

Archaeological data help Layton demonstrate his point about change beyond and before colonialism in various regions, as in Australia, the Northwest Coast of North America, northern Europe, and the Kalahari, for example. Layton mentions that for the Kalahari, Ed Wilmsen has suggested that Iron Age pastoralists arrived as early as 200 B.C.-A.D. 400 and thus, hunter-gatherers there have had a long and varied series of interactions with others.[18] One might usefully cite the work of Rob Gordon here, too.[19] The case of Arnhem Land in Australia shows us that Aboriginals were not farming historically, but they could have easily done so after repeated contact with farmer-fishermen from the Macassan islands. Layton makes the intriguing suggestion that this was due to the fact that hunting and gathering was more efficient than farming in Arnhem Land.[20] These cases and others, too, show that symbiotic relationships between hunter-gatherers and others are quite common, and in some cases reach dependence, even though it is not necessarily an economic necessity. Perhaps more fascinating are the cases of “oscillation” from hunter-gatherer to farmer and/or pastoralist and back to hunter-gatherer.

Layton reviews the effects of state policy on hunter-gatherers in several ways, emphasizing first how much

they have been changed by colonial forces and the fact that none had escaped some change by the time they were first met by anthropologists. I would be willing to argue this latter point with Layton and some of his sources, however, at least in terms of the degree of change. Layton cites notable examples such as Knud Rasmussen’s report on the Netsilik Inuit of the northern Canadian Arctic at the time of the “Fifth Thule Expedition” in the 1920s, and Baldwin Spencer and Frank J. Gillin’s report on the Central Desert Aboriginals of Australia during the 1890s.[21] Twenty years or so of contact with “pastoralists” (Anglo-Australian cattle ranchers) had occurred before Spencer arrived in the Central Desert, whereas the failed “John Franklin Expedition” into the High Arctic predated Rasmussen in the region by seventy to eighty years. I would argue that these events did not fundamentally alter the socio-cultural fabric of these hunter-gatherer groups, or alter them much at all. Nonetheless, I subscribe to Layton’s basic point here, which is that some degree of cultural contact and change preceded the documentation of most, if not all, hunter-gatherer groups worldwide.

Layton’s later discussion of the effects of ranching more generally, the “conservationism” movement and national parks, and hunter-gatherer “land rights” provide a polite condemnation of how hunter-gatherers have been treated in many different areas. While these aspects of recent history are generally depressing, one can be positive about some aspects of hunter-gatherer land rights, as discussed and not discussed in this chapter. “Ayers Rock,” or “Uluru,” in the Central Desert is a good example, but it is not specifically discussed.[22] The case of Nunavut is discussed in this chapter. Nunavut was created less than ten years ago and instituted in 1999 as an Inuit territory in northern Canada, including an immense landscape carved out of the pre-existing Northwest Territories of Canada. Perhaps the good done there is outweighed by another Canadian example cited by Layton, however, the case of the James Bay Cree (First Nations) people of northern Quebec, also in Canada, where several indigenous hunter-gatherer groups have been struggling for thirty years against massive hydroelectric development. The battle lines are drawn with cases like these. At bottom, Layton tells us that he considers the “tendency for hunter-gatherers with very different histories to converge on particular solutions to living in certain environments more insightful, in understanding the role of hunting and gathering in human evolution, than the hypothetical conservation of an ancestral condition” (p. 315).

In conclusion, this publication is an important con-

tribution to hunter-gatherer studies, a very important one. In general, the editors (and contributing authors) are to be heartily congratulated on the careful writing and composition of the text throughout this publication, although (just) a relatively tiny number of errors crept into it. Moreover, although it is a “handsome” production and more or less well illustrated, a few more visual representations certainly would have been useful, notably more photographs of hunter-gatherers themselves.

A single photograph of people, a San group in the Kalahari, is included as a suitable cover illustration, but all readers in general and students in particular would have profited from more such illustrations within the book itself. In some ways, it feels like this was done intentionally to “objectify” the book and render the various contributions more “scientific,” or is it not fashionable to collect “visual” images any more? However, this may be reading too much into the final design and composition on the part of the authors and the editors among them. In the end, I wouldn’t recommend the book in its entirety for undergraduate students since it is rather technical in spots. Nonetheless, graduate students, hunter-gatherer specialists and a broad range of anthropologists will find this an important publication and worthy of inclusion in their personal and institutional libraries. Bravo to one and all involved in this outstanding work!

Notes

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